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ABSTRACT

The aspects of the team development style that were employed at the University of Mid-America (UMA) in developing multi-media instruction for a new and open university setting for adults are discussed in this paper. The experience of three team projects are drawn upon in defining some particular characteristics of internal team functioning and their relationships with the overall setting. Each team was assigned separate tasks; the first team was to develop instruction for an accounting course, team two was to acquire materials for an introductory course in psychology, and the third team was to develop a curriculum for a cultural history course. The activities of twenty staff members who made up the three teams were built around specific roles and responsibilities that were assigned to each person based on their expertise in that area. The internal and external conflicts that emerged as a result of individual differences and interest are discussed in this paper. (Author/DEP)

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Styles of Instructional Development

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Styles of Instructional Development

Over the past ten years, instructional development projects have proliferated throughout most educational settings. Some of these projects have been large, national, multiple-year studies designed to revolutionize whole curricula (i.e., Harlen, 1973). Other projects have been initiated and conducted by one or two people on a part-time basis (i.e., Bugg, 1974). Various instructional development projects seem to differ in terms of such things as the size and scope of their efforts, the resources expended, the people involved, and perhaps even the quality of instructional materials produced. Basically, there seems to be a continuum of styles for instructional development activities ranging from simple, individual efforts to large scale productions.

Accompanying the frequency of development activities has been an increase in the number of published reports on these projects. In spite of these reports, however, there has been relatively little reflection on the varying project styles. This is unfortunate since careful observation and analysis of various styles in different settings should permit an understanding of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the styles even if direct comparisons are inappropriate. The symposium for which this paper was prepared represents one attempt to reflect on some styles employed in several post-secondary contexts.

The purpose of this paper is to examine aspects of the team development style used by the University of Mid-America (UMA) in developing multi-media instruction for a new, open university setting. The experiences of three

team projects are drawn upon in defining some particular characteristics of internal team functioning and their relationship with the overall setting. As background for this discussion, the paper begins with a description of UMA and the instructional development teams.

The Setting: UMA and the Instructional Development Teams[2]

There has been an increasing awareness of the need for expanding educational opportunities for adults during this century. Recent developments have been the subject of studies by the Commission on Non-Traditional Study (1973) and the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education (1971). These studies have recommended continuing efforts to make post-secondary education more accessible. The British Open University, Israel's Everyman's University, and the Empire State College of New York are only a few examples of attempts to make education more accessible.

One such "open university setting" is the University of Mid-America which represents a new cooperative relationship among the University of Nebraska, Iowa State University, the University of Kansas, Kansas State University, and the University of Missouri. Formed for the purpose of developing courseware, UMA will assist the four member states in designing state systems for course dissemination and the provision of educational services. Thus, UMA is not a university in the traditional sense of an institution which grants degrees or offers campus-based degree programs.

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[2]Portions of this summary are adapted from UMA's 1974 proposal to the National Institute of Education.

Currently, UMA is still in a formative period of its development, having recently been organized from an earlier project, the State University of Nebraska. During this period it is trying to resolve a number of internal management, planning, and philosophical issues while remaining responsive to the concerns of various state and federal audiences. The many uncertainties of an organization at this stage have also played a role in some of the issues confronting the course development teams.

The Instructional Development Teams

The course offerings created at the University of Mid-America follow an instructional development process which includes these steps: definition of the frame of reference of the course (audience definition, establishment of funder's priorities and institutional, student, and faculty priorities), creating goals and objectives for the course, allocating instructional tasks to the various media, developing prototype instruction, gathering student feedback, developing full course components, and field testing the materials with a group of representative students. These steps of development are accomplished by a course team composed of experts on content, instructional design, evaluation, and production. The multimedia products developed by the team are field tested and revised, based on the evaluation information gathered during the trial run, and are ultimately delivered to learners through state delivery systems.

This paper is based on the experiences of the three teams which were operating during 1974. Each team was faced with a rather different task. One team was concerned with a continuing instructional development project initiated by two faculty members from the University of Nebraska.

The team worked with these faculty on the design, production, and evaluation of a basic course in accounting. Eventually, this course became UMA's first course offering in the fall of 1974.

The second team was mainly concerned with adapting a set of acquired materials for an introductory course in psychology. They were responsible for revising the materials to fit UMA's delivery system and the requirements of a faculty advisory panel. UMA contracted with an independent commercial agency for the right to use these materials and the revised package became UMA's second course offering.

Finally, the third team was operating under a planning grant from a federal agency for the development of a curriculum for a course on the cultural history of the Great Plains. This team had to work with a variety of experts on local and regional history, geography, literature, and the arts in order to define the course's goals, content, and presentations. Their activities ended with the preparation of a detailed description of the proposed course. This proposal was submitted to the federal agency and subsequently funded for partial production during 1975.

The remainder of this paper is devoted to a description of specific characteristics of the teams and their development activities. These conclusions were developed during the authors' close association with all three teams over a six month period. The authors were participant-observers on two of the teams (psychology and cultural history), and additional information was gathered through individual interviews with team members and UMA administrators. Work by Eisner and Vallance (1974), Sarason (1972), and Walker (1970) was used in developing a conceptual framework for understanding the teams' activities.

Characteristics of the Team Approach to Instructional Development

Summarizing the activities of three team projects involving over twenty staff members and numerous consultants is a difficult task. No description can provide a complete and unbiased picture while also doing an efficient job of communicating the key aspects to others. So rather than presenting detailed portrayals of each team's activities over time, the following material first describes the way the teams functioned, and then reviews some specific problems which seem to typify the difficulties of this approach.

The assignment of specific roles and responsibilities to different persons with particular kinds of expertise is the most unique characteristic of the team approach. These experts originate from offices (departments) centered around their own specialties and then have to function in a very interdisciplinary team setting. For many members, the team project becomes their fulltime responsibility.

The composition of a team is decided through analysis of the particular project given to that team. At UMA, the typical team was supposed to have a faculty member, an instructional developer, a writer, a producer, an evaluator, and a measurement specialist. Actually, however, no UMA team has ever been composed like this. One team has had several writers specializing in television scripts, audio tape scripts, and printed materials. Another team included one fulltime faculty member and several parttime assistant content specialists. Teams created for future projects are likely to have similarly varied compositions. The necessary functions of content, development, production, and evaluation vary little, but the extent to which they are required for a given project determines the exact roles assigned to each team.

The development teams have been relatively independent, self-sufficient, task-oriented subsystems of the overall organization. Team members had to schedule their own work, plan for necessary resources, and divide up various project tasks. Most members started with a relatively clear idea of their own responsibilities, but some jobs resulted in needless duplication of effort, or were totally overlooked.

Team leadership varied across the development, production, and content areas, sometimes reflecting personality differences, and sometimes the requirements of the particular task. Generally, the content specialist and instructional developer were responsible for defining the scope, sequence, pedagogy, and management systems for the course. In the future, UMA may change team staffing patterns so that the developer and content specialist start work before the rest of the team. Such changes in the team approach will reflect UMA's experiences with its initial projects.

Some Problems with the Team Approach

Problems affecting the team approach to instructional development can be divided into two groups: those external to the team, and those originating from within the team. Representative external problems are the administration's philosophy regarding content and instruction, the team structure chosen at the beginning of the project, and the influence exerted by interest groups beyond UMA. Problems internal to the team are usually the result of conflict between the role assigned to a person and his expertise, the kind of team leadership, and lack of agreement between team members on the educational nature of the team's project. Further discussion of these problem areas follows with examples from the three projects.

External problems. Course development projects are initiated by UMA's administration according to the directions of funding agencies and representatives from the four member states. In planning the team projects, UMA administrators work from their own particular educational philosophies. It is almost unavoidable, then, that certain curricular viewpoints get built into the project plans and expectations. Later, these implicit viewpoints or conceptions of the course sometimes cause misunderstandings and confusion as the team proceeds with its deliberations. For example, UMA asked a content expert to help them outline the cultural history project. This expert conceived the course as an innovative, interdisciplinary attempt to improve people's understanding of the Great Plains experience. However, both UMA and the funding agency felt certain pressures relating to the course's academic credibility and suitability for further funding, which implied a rather different kind of course. The development team was eventually formed around the content expert and his original ideas, but no attempt was made to raise and resolve the conflicting viewpoints. Later, this became a source of confusion and frustration for the content expert and other team members.

The planning for a particular team's structure also reflects the way in which implicit interpretations of project tasks can lead to wasted efforts. A course team usually has a number of fulltime members, each having particular expertise in development, evaluation, production, or the course content. As a team is staffed with a specific mix of roles or expertise, a particular direction is defined for its activities, whether or not the team members are aware of it. The psychology course team, for example, had an instructional developer who had committed at least half of his time to other UMA responsibilities. As the only team provided with

just a half-time developer, psychology must have been initially viewed as requiring little re-design of the acquired materials. However, this perception was never explicitly communicated to the team and its content consultants. In the end, the team did far more design work than was expected, or even allowed within UMA's final contract for the right to use those materials.

There are a number of other examples of problems arising from expectations and responsibilities that were not clearly discussed between the team and the UMA administration or funding agencies. The priorities of funding agencies were a particular source of confusion for the teams. In one case, the agency's priorities were so different from the team's that when the discrepancies did emerge almost all previous team products had to be revised. This can become particularly irksome to the team as they often come to view themselves as solely responsible for their course.

Many of the problems between teams and their external audiences have to be resolved with each new project. However, there will be considerable improvement as UMA matures and evolves a unified philosophy regarding its role in providing educational services. Even if that philosophy remains unstated, it will gradually be assimilated into team deliberations and the overall orientation of the curriculum.

Internal problems. One of the main reasons for team-style instructional development is that the close collaboration of various experts is supposed to improve the overall quality of the products and generally facilitate the development task. Unfortunately, teams are susceptible to a range of internal problems that can lessen their effectiveness. Some of these problems are common to the experiences of any group, but a few relate more specifically to development activities.

When a group of people work closely together, they sometimes start assuming other people's roles. When this happens the project suffers due to role and task conflicts. For example, one team's content expert became so interested in media production activities that he began to avoid his original duties. Other teams had more subtle problems in which one member would occasionally forget his role and begin making someone else's decisions. This rarely caused any actual harm, but it sometimes created resentment or tension.

Leadership was one of the most important and least defined roles in the three teams. A leader was needed to coordinate team activities, resolve logistical questions, and serve as spokesman. The leader also had some increased influence on the nature of the team's products. The problem came in determining who should be the leader. Various members of UMA's staff and administration had different reasons for supporting the content expert, instructional developer, or producer as leader. No clear policy was adopted at the time and at one point or another there were team leaders from each of those areas. In addition, one team was leaderless for some time and the other teams both had conflicts over leadership. It is a crucial issue since the experience to date shows some differences in team functioning and products across teams in relation to the leader's particular background.

The main theme underlying most of these external and internal problems is the effect of people's conceptions of education on their approach to various tasks. Eisner and Vallance (1974) have discussed this area at some length and describe how a person's conception of educational worth is part of a whole value system that influences all of his thoughts and activities. The varying conceptions of team members was particularly

apparent and sometimes became a source of great frustration. For example, the accounting team had two members with very different conceptions of the course that they were unable to resolve. So rather than collaborate on the various materials, each took a piece and developed it according to his own conception. This meant that the course ended up with a television component that was primarily affective in orientation, and a study guide that was a carefully structured treatment of the content and objectives. Similar but less obvious value differences arose throughout the project, many times in the guise of a seemingly simple problem.

Concluding Remarks

This paper has given a brief review of UMA's experiences with course teams. It has not tried to develop any prescriptions for how an ideal team should function. There is not enough literature in this area and the authors do not have enough experience with team projects in different settings to develop any generalizations. Hopefully, the development literature will begin to concentrate more on the people aspects of the development task and less on the building of systematic models for the decision process. One of the most important aspects of instructional development is being able to move a group of individuals towards resolution or consensus on a particular topic. Only a few authors (i.e., Eisner and Vallance, 1974; Walker, 1970) have had much to say in this area. This situation needs to change.

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